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AUTHOR	Cooke-Plagwitz, Jessamine
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ABSTRACT

In order to encourage foreign-language faculty to increase their use of technology in the classroom, the University of South Carolina has created a new role for the Academic Director of its Foreign Language Learning Center. The director oversees a Faculty Development Center for faculty interested in incorporating technology into their curricula. The center provides an area where interested faculty can develop courseware, design and maintain World Wide Web pages, work with audio and video, and experiment with instructional technology (IT) in a non-threatening environment. In addition, the center offers a series of IT workshops geared specifically toward foreign-language faculty. This article outlines the nature of the center's faculty development efforts. A copy of the workshop evaluation questionnaire is included. (Author/MES)

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New Directions in Foreign Language Learning: Faculty Development at the University of South Carolina

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Jessamine Cooke-Plagwitz
Academic Director,
Mimms Language Learning Center
University of South Carolina
Columbia, SC 29208
jplagwitz@sc.edu

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Abstract: Foreign language instructors are some of the most innovative teachers in education today, and educational institutions worldwide are encouraging their foreign-language faculty to increase their use of technology in the classroom. To that end, The University of South Carolina has created a new role for the Academic Director of its Foreign Language Learning Center. The Director oversees a Faculty Development Center for faculty interested in incorporating technology into their curricula. The Center provides an area where interested faculty can develop courseware, design and maintain Web pages, work with audio and video, and simply experiment with instructional technology in a non-threatening environment. In addition, the Center offers a series of IT workshops geared specifically towards foreign-language faculty. This article outlines the nature of the Center's faculty development efforts.

Introduction

In their article, "Teacher Training for CALL and its Implications", Curtin and Shinall (1987) assert that "to ignore advances in technology is to be left behind" (p.256). This is especially true for today's teaching faculty. Not only do instructors in traditionally technological fields, i.e., physics or engineering, need to be current in their knowledge of instructional technology, but faculty in the humanities and social sciences are now equally expected to incorporate technology into their curricula. This challenge fills some faculty with a sense of dread, afraid, as they are, that the computer will sound the death knell for their profession, while in others, it incites a whole new love of teaching and curriculum design. What accounts for the former's "technophobia" is often the result of a lack of familiarity with very basic technology. A substantial percentage of the teaching faculty in foreign language has followed traditional "book-based" programs and, in fact, there are still relatively few institutions in North America that offer an instructional technology component to their graduate foreign language programs. Such programs tend to be literature-based, and, if there is any teacher training at all for graduate teaching assistants, it is often woefully lacking in any mention of, or instruction in CAI or other technological applications for teaching. Nevertheless, asserts Michael Bush (1997), "ready or not [. . .], technology will play an ever-increasing role in each of our institutions. It therefore behooves foreign language education professionals to better understand technology and its potential for foreign language learning" (p. xiv).

The result of the present system is that many foreign-language Ph.D.'s enter new assistant professorships without having any real knowledge of technology-enhanced instruction. Furthermore, the pressure placed on new faculty to produce a significant amount of research in order to attain tenure does not leave them with much time to try out new technologies or to be particularly creative with their teaching. Many of the same traditional departments that do not offer adequate training in teaching with technology are also reluctant to accept research done in this area as meeting the criteria for tenure: "Without an excellent research record, one cannot expect a promotion in other than teaching institutions. However, in teaching institutions the teaching load is so high [...] that there is insufficient time" (Solomon, 1994, p.29). Thus the cycle continues.

A New Approach

How, then, do we remedy this situation and assist foreign-language faculty in incorporating technology into their curricula? The University of South Carolina in Columbia has addressed this concern by creating a new job-description for the Academic Director of its Foreign Language Learning Center. While the position to this point has been strictly administrative, the new job description calls for a foreign language professor as well. In addition to fulfilling the traditional administrative role of center director, the new position carries an instructional component. The director must teach one course per year in her area of

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expertise, in this case German or French language, and must design and hold a series of faculty development workshops covering a variety of topics in instructional technology.

According to the Department of Education's 1993 paper, "Using Technology to Support Education Reform", the challenges faced by today's faculty include:

- Learning to use a variety of technology applications;
- Using, adapting, and designing technology enhanced curricula to meet students (sic) needs;
- Expanding content knowledge;
- Taking on new roles; and
- Responding to individual students.

(Means, 1993, http://www.ed.gov/pubs/EdReformStudies/TechReforms/chap4c.html)
Furthermore, Kassen and Higgins (1997) include the following necessities in their list of requirements for faculty development programs:

- Establishing a comfort level with technology;
- Integrating technology into the curriculum;
- Developing the critical skills to use technology effectively. (p.264)

These are the criteria to which I, as the Center director, adhere in designing my faculty development workshops. The first three workshops I conducted concentrated on uses of Microsoft PowerPoint in the foreign language classroom. Two following workshops served as introductions to HTML and to some commercially available HTML editors. Other workshop topics include a series on teaching with the World Wide Web and hypermedia, authoring programs and courseware creation, and how to work effectively with email and discussion groups. My intention is to provide the foreign language faculty at the University of South Carolina with as much variety and as many topics as possible in the workshop series so that they will be able to decide for themselves which applications fit best into their curricula and teaching styles.

Faculty Development

Workshops are set up in the following manner: notices are sent out a month in advance of each workshop, and faculty members are asked to sign up to participate. Attendance is generally capped at ten so that there is adequate time and space for each participant to receive individual attention. The workshops are held in the Foreign Language Learning Center Computing Lab. Participants each work on their own computers, and, depending on the subject of the workshop, are able to choose between PC and Macintosh platforms. The instructor machine is connected to an LCD projector, and the desktop image projected onto a screen. Workshop participants are asked to follow along with the instruction for the first half of the workshop, and are then "turned loose" in the second half and encouraged to work on their projects on their own.

One of the more important aspects of incorporating new technologies into the foreign-language classroom involves identifying student needs and subsequently tailoring the use of technology to them. For example, the student who is a visual learner will likely respond more positively to a multimedia-based grammar lesson that includes several colorful illustrations, while a student who learns a language more easily through aural channels may prefer an application with plenty of audio examples, and so on. The workshop series takes these particularities into consideration and illustrates teaching techniques that utilize several media. Individual professors are free to design their projects using as many or as few media types as they wish. Naturally, the more media types an instructor can include in her educational materials, the more students she will reach and, thus, assist in language acquisition.

In addition to the workshop series, foreign-language faculty have access to the new Faculty Development Center (FDC), which is equipped with two high-end PC's and one Macintosh G3. Hardware peripherals available to faculty include a flatbed scanner and CD "burner". Software available to faculty in the Center include Microsoft Office 2000 (Developer's Suite, Authorware, Adobe PhotoShop, Hyperstudio, etc. The setup of the FDC makes is a comfortable and inviting place for faculty to familiarize themselves with various technologies in a low-stress environment. Moreover, the director is available full time to

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assist faculty with questions regarding the pedagogical advantages of particular programs or courseware designs.

Evaluation

An important aspect of any educational venture is ascertaining whether, in fact, the material covered by one's students is actually learned, and, in the case of faculty development, subsequently used by instructors in their classrooms. In order to measure these criteria, the following questionnaires are distributed to workshop participants, a) immediately after the workshop (Fig. 1), and b) at the end of the semester following the workshop (Fig. 2):

1=agree strongly 2=agree 3=disagree 4=disagree strongly
5=no opinion

Question	Av. Response (24 Respondents)
The workshop was helpful to me.	1
I will use the technology covered for my teaching.	1.5
The material covered was easy to follow.	1.16
I would recommend this technology to my colleagues.	1
I would like to learn more about the technology covered.	1.3
I plan on incorporating more technology into my teaching.	1.3

Figure 1: Questionnaire A – distributed immediately after the workshop.

In which workshop(s) did you participate?

1=agree strongly 2=agree 3=disagree 4=disagree strongly 5=no opinion

I have used the information learned in the workshop(s) I took.

I used the project(s) I produced in the workshop(s) in my teaching.

I regularly use multimedia in my classroom

Since taking the workshop(s), I spend more time in the Language Center.

I encourage my students to submit their assignments electronically.

I require my students to work in the Language Center.

My students receive an orientation to the Language Center each semester.

I plan to continue using technology in my teaching.

I plan to take more instructional technology workshops.

Figure 2: Questionnaire B – distributed at the end of the semester following the workshop.

As the workshop series has only been ongoing for one semester, questionnaire B has not yet been distributed to foreign language faculty. Initial results of questionnaire A are promising, however, and workshop attendance has progressively increased throughout the course of the first and second semesters. An increasing number of faculty are making use of the FDC for projects such as a virtual tour of France, and an instructional video for students of Italian. While the results of these surveys do nothing to indicate the efficacy of the various technologies used, one must recall that the ultimate goal of these questionnaires is to ascertain whether foreign language faculty are increasing their use of technology both in terms of quantity and variety. Accurate measurements of technology's effectiveness in improving language learning are notoriously difficult to attain (see Ehrmann 1997 & Trotter 1999), and will not be sought in this series of evaluations.

Conclusion

Traditionally trained foreign language faculty must be given the opportunity to develop their teaching skills in a non-threatening environment where support is available if it is necessary, and where creativity is encouraged and appreciated. All too often, faculty balk at attempting to incorporate technology into their curricula because the amount of technology available is too staggering and the amount of time necessary to learn it is simply unavailable. A program like that currently in place at the University of South Carolina removes some of the unknowns that prevent many instructors from introducing technology into their courses by allowing them to take the technology for a "test drive" ahead of time. Teachers are free to use the technology introduced according to their own personal instructional needs and wishes. Moreover, while individual departments often hesitate to purchase equipment such as scanners and digital cameras along with large presentation programs for only a few interested faculty, housing such tools in a central location such as the Language Learning Center, allows faculty from all language departments access to them when they need it. Ultimately, I hope that all foreign language teachers at the University of South Carolina will feel comfortable enough with instructional technology to make it a part of all of their courses. In the meantime, it is encouraging to see language professors attending the workshops, working in the Faculty Development Center, and taking an interest in what they can do with technology in the classroom, as well as what technology in the classroom can do for them.

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